Commentary: Nationalism and Transnationalism in Anthropological Research

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The history of physical anthropology has most often been situated and studied in the context of specific colonial powers and nation states. At the same time, the study of human variation had as its scope to study human evolution on a global scale. It thus necessarily included transnational border crossings and scholarly exchanges of specimen collections that allowed researchers to study migration and differentiation patterns on a large scale. In addition, scientists working in a national context often sought international approval to validate their findings and gain national standing. The set of essays collected in this special issue takes this tension between national, transnational, and global impulses in the anthropological and genetic study of human differences as the central theme. The cases studies presented consider a broad range of imperial powers and nation states and cover the interwar period up to the Cold War. Together, they make a series of important interventions in respect to both the historiography of the anthropological sciences, broadly construed, and to current reflections on transnational approaches in the history of science and technology. Written mostly by young scholars in the field, the special issue bears witness to the renewed interest in and the vibrancy of the history of physical anthropology at a time of a general reckoning with widespread institutional racism and racial inequalities around the world.

At first sight, it might be surprising that although the studies aim to address the transnational aspect of anthropological research, the starting point in nearly all essays is a national frame. The geographical breadth is broad and reaches beyond the main colonial powers. The collection comprises essays on racial blood group research and nation building in Greece in the interwar years; on the Norwegian Association for Heredity Research in the same period; on the efforts to establish international standards for

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racial measurements, energetically pursued by British anthropologist Miriam Tildesley in the 1920s–1940s; on race science in the Portuguese empire; on the role of racial science in nationalistic projects in Maharashtra, India; and on racial anthropology in post-World-War-Two Japan.

Equally surprising at first, is the focus on single individuals, often women. Yet it is exactly in the itineraries of individual researchers in these national contexts and through an attention to the objects, methods, and instruments of their research that the essays come to confront the transnational dimensions of anthropological research. The way the actors navigate national and international pressures and expectations plays out differently in every case.

In the 1920s, blood group researchers promised to put racial science on a more scientific footing. The endeavor built on international collaboration and especially on the study of diverse populations around the globe, but it was nevertheless re-deployed to nationalistic aims as exemplified by John Koumaris' blood group studies of the Greek population (Lefkaditou, this issue). With his studies, Koumaris aimed to establish the homogeneity and distinct character of the Greeks, including recent refugees from Asia Minor who supposedly shared Old Greek ancestry, even if he did not find any correlation between blood types and morphological characteristics.

In Norway, the International Eugenics Movement played a key role in the creation of the Norwegian Association for Heredity Research and the coordination of genetic research in the country. Nevertheless, standing and recognition of individuals in the international eugenic movement did not necessarily translate into recognition and influence in the national academic and political context, especially so following the increasing radicalization of the international eugenics movement in the early 1930s (Kyllingstad, this issue).

A similar if inverse dynamic developed in the racial studies of "hybrid children" and the effect of miscegenation in postwar Japan. The children were the offspring of Japanese mothers and US soldiers stationed in Japan, especially during the American occupation of the country. The studies of these children took place in the context of the Human Adaptability section of the International Biological Program in the 1960s and 70s. The international context gave the studies a veneer of respectability but the overtly racist undertones of the studies became increasing unacceptable in the international arena at a time when human biologists were taking their distance from the racial science of the previous decades. Japanese researchers adapted to this dynamic by reserving the racialized interpretation of their studies to their Japanese language publications geared to a national audience and tuning down the racial rhetoric in their English-language publications (Hyun, this issue).

Portuguese racial scientists also struggled how to keep unconditioned control of the racial studies in their colonies while seeking international legitimacy for the same studies. They excluded foreign researchers from their colonial field sites in an attempt to keep absolute scientific authority and political sovereignty with respect to their colonial subjects, but they depended on foreign exchanges to validate their own scientific findings and to draw selectively on their specialized expertise. Roque develops the notion of "transnational isolationism" to capture that tension that characterized Portuguese science and racial anthropology specifically during Salazar's fascist reign over Portugal and its colonies that endured well into the 1970s. He exemplifies this notion focusing on António de Almeida's anthropological mission to East Timor that doubled up as a form of "scientific occupation" of the colony. The expedition materialized as a direct effort to thwart an Australian anthropological field study on the island (Roque, this issue).

Even an overtly transnational training could be corralled to nationalistic ends as exemplified by the case of Irawati Karve, a prominent Indian anthropologist at the time of India's struggles for national independence. Trained at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Berlin in the late 1920s, Karve employed the methods and instruments she acquired in Germany to provide scientific legitimacy to racialized biological concepts of caste, ethnic and religious groups in a distinctly nationalistic vein, especially in respect to the post-colonial formation of the regional state of Maharatshtra, her home state. In other words, the use of internationally circulating methods, instruments (like Rudolf Martin's anthropometer, caliper, and eye color chart, and a skin color chart designed by another German anthropologist), and specimens (here the ones developed for anthropological projects in German colonies in Africa) contributed to the transnational validation of a racial framework, yet they were re-inscribed in national anthropological projects (Barbosa, this issue). A further noteworthy aspect that emerges from this study is that German anthropological methods were embraced by anticolonial nationalists like Karve in India as a counterweight to methods from British anthropologists, which were directly identified with the oppressing colonial power. Anthropological methodologies imported from Germany found favor in Southeast Asia at a moment in time when they were already discredited in Germany itself (Clever, Hyun, and Burton, this issue).

A project that started with an explicit international agenda of standardizing racial measurements was undermined by nationalist sentiments. British anthropologist Miriam Tildesley, who most energetically pursued the project for several decades, was a student of Karl Pearson. The standardization project was supported by the Royal Anthropological Institute

in London, where Tildesley was a fellow. US, German, French, and Italian anthropologists alike resented British interference in their methodologies at a time of rising nationalistic tensions. As Iris Clever documents, sexism also played a role in their resistance to Tildesley's efforts (Clever, this issue).

It should be mentioned at this point that women scientists figure prominently in the case studies presented in this issue. Next to Tildesley, Kristine Bonnevie in Norway and Irawati Karve in India play a key role. Given that we often find women scientists better represented in new or less prestigious research fields, for instance in genetics or crystallography in the 1920s or 1930s, this is surprising given that anthropology played an important legitimating function in the nationalistic regimes and nation building projects described in the essays (Richmond 1997). The question is not directly addressed in the various contributions, but the circumstances seem to suggest that although race science had strong legitimizing functions, the field for most part of the history did not enjoy high scientific esteem, which may have opened the doors to women practitioners. Nevertheless, women scientists had to contend with sexist attitudes in all stages of their careers as exemplified most clearly in Tildesley's case.

The essays highlight the importance of a few key institutions, above all the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Berlin, for the international circulation of research methods and tools. Before it fell into disrepute because of its close involvement with the murderous projects of the Nazi regime, the institute attracted a continuous stream of foreign students and researchers from many different countries (Barbosa, this issue; Clever, this issue). A more systematic analysis of the circulation and use of certain textbooks (above all Rudolf Martin's *Lehrbuch der Anthropologie*; see Hyun, this issue) and of the international instrument trade might have given this point more salience. Nevertheless, it is clear that despite the nationalistic tensions, there was a considerable exchange of methods and ideas across national borders as well as a sharing of resources—which makes the Portuguese case stand out. International conferences, like the international eugenic conferences in the interwar years, or international initiatives like the postwar International Biological Program offered additional venues for scientific exchange and validation of results.

Was the anthropological and genetic study of human populations special in the way researchers had to negotiate national exigencies and international ambitions or can it teach us something more general about nationalism and transnationalism in science at the time of waning colonial powers, the rise of nationalistic and authoritarian regimes, and struggles for decolonization? I suggest both is the case. As mentioned at the beginning, the plethora of sciences, from physical anthropology to blood group

research, human biology, and human genetics, aimed at producing knowledge on human group similarities and differences were per definition transnational and comparative in their outlook. Yet their findings carried special political meaning at the national level. Exactly for these reasons, the history of physical anthropology can highlight some of the tensions inherent in this dual allegiance that in other contexts remain more hidden. A recent volume on transnational science and technology has highlighted how nations operate bureaucratic controls to police the way knowledge and technologies travel (Krige 2019). The set of essays presented here highlights the role of individual researchers in negotiating these tensions and the multiple ways in which the transnational arena comes to bear on the national endeavors. It is a reminder that in the era of nation states transnational initiatives always have to be balanced with national exigencies. This makes truly transnational endeavors like the standardization effort of physical anthropologists in the interwar years stand out. It also explains their fragility.

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